

## Beaded Wheels

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*Beaded Wheels* is the voice of The Vintage Car  
Club of New Zealand (Inc.) and its 35 branches  
covering the length and breadth of the country.  
The efforts of our members continue fostering  
and ever widening the interest in this segment  
of our country's history. It is to these people, who  
appreciate the fascination of age, the individuality  
and the functional elegance of vehicles from a  
bygone era, that this magazine is dedicated.

*Beaded Wheels* – A very apt and well-known title  
however readers may wonder at the origin of the  
name. By way of explanation beaded edge wheels  
use beaded edge tyres that are kept in place by  
reinforced rubber beads, which fit into the rolled  
edges of the wheel rim. This style of wheel was a  
distinctive feature of early motoring being used  
on early bicycles, many pre-1924 cars and most  
motorcycles until 1927. The VCCNZ adopted  
the title *Beaded Wheels* for their quarterly club  
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to the monthly *Guff Sheet*.

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# Beaded Wheels

Issue 315 April/May 2012



UK reader Reg Eyre tackles a 1900 De  
Dion Tricycle with entertaining results,  
page 12.



Frequent visitor from the Netherlands  
Geert de Boer tests a 1903 Pebok,  
page 26.



West Coast Branch have views galore  
when planning their branch runs, see *Idle  
Torque*, page 51



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*It's hard to miss them coming - Bernard and Betty Wright's 1932  
Austin on the 2012 VCCNZ International Rally.*

*Photo by Mark Brimblecombe. www.markbrimblecombe.com*





# The Militaire

## The most unorthodox motorcycle ever made in America?

Words and photos Peter Alderdice

The Militaire Autocycle Company, founded in 1910 or 1911, built its first machines in Cleveland, Ohio. In 1912 they announced the underslung Militaire which departed sharply from conventional forms in design and construction, and was conceived as a two-wheeled car. The original vehicle, featuring two girder-type frame rails, powered by a single-cylinder 480cc, has hub-centre steering, a steering wheel and retractable outrigger wheels at the rear to make it stable at rest, since its operator was not supposed to put his (her) feet down. This and all subsequent machines had an open frame and the intent was to appeal to automotive people rather than motorcyclists. Their literature though the years refers to the vehicle as a car and one catalogue mentions that it is never necessary to assume an awkward position to ride the Militaire, apparently meaning the rider steps into it rather than throwing a leg over the saddle.

The Cleveland operation expired in 1913, but was resuscitated a year later in Buffalo, New York by owner Neil R Sinclair. The single had been replaced by a four-cylinder engine, and the steering wheel was supplanted by handlebars. The automotive-style frame and rear idler wheels remained. The 1065cc engine delivered better than 11 horsepower through a three-speed floor shift transmission and shaft drive. The engine displacement is 68cu inch being 2 11/16 bore and a 3 inch stroke. The wheelbase, like the early Henderson, was 65 inches. The wooden artillery wheels carried 28-inch Goodyear beaded edge tyres. They claimed a capacity of 25,000 vehicles a year, but only very limited quantities were built, and the

likely tally is under 100 machines.

Given the name, the Militaire was intended as a military device from the beginning, but it was too long and heavy for a motorcycle and too unstable for a car. The army did buy a few examples for use in France in 1918, but the machines were immobilised by mud. The Buffalo enterprise had also succumbed, and Neil Sinclair reformed the company in New Jersey and changed the name to Militor.

In addition to its very long wheel base, heavy automotive-type frame, and car-like engine and gearbox, the Militor had twelve-spoke wooden artillery wheels. It is believed that fewer than 100 of these machines were ever built, and in an era when conventional motorcycles of proven design and reputation were having a difficult time surviving against the affordable Model T, it is simply amazing that this ungainly behemoth struggled on in the marketplace for more than a decade.

NR Sinclair was obviously not one to retreat in the face of adversity. When the Jersey City operation floundered, he set up shop again in early 1919 at the Knox Motors factory, an automobile company in Springfield, Massachusetts, just across the street from the Indian factory. Inevitably some Indian people were attracted to the new company, now called Militor Motor.

But this association also failed within a year, and Sinclair relocated in Bridgeport, Massachusetts under the banner of the Bullard Machine Tool Company, where production finally ceased once and for all in 1922. By this time the Militor had a more conventional front steering geometry, had lost its training wheels, and was offered

only with a sidecar attached since it was entirely too heavy and cumbersome to actually ride as a solo motorcycle.

Very few Militaire/Militors are known to exist today. There is a complete machine on display at the Thomson's Motorcycle Museum at Rongotea, near Palmerston North. An example of the final design with sidecar is on display at the Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum in Birmingham, Alabama. A chassis is being used as a pattern by Ontario restorer Fred Crawford, who is replicating it for two current restoration projects.

### Remaining examples:

- Peter Thomson (Rongotea) #234 complete machine & engine #122
- Richard Morris (California) #203
- Barber Museum Militor
- Jim Dennie (New York) 1915
- Patrick Ryan (Australia) #114 complete machine
- Mick Atkins (Australia) complete machine #250, #261
- Barry Brown (Canada) Militor
- Geert Versleyen (Holland) 1915 complete machine
- Unknown (Denmark) #117
- Stefano Milani (Italy) Complete Militaire and Militor
- Jerobek Pavel (Czech Rep) Complete machine, Militor
- Fred Crawford (Ontario)
- Paul S Larios 1914
- Glen Bull then Dale Conlon. A complete machine assembled from #120,123, sold to USA early 2010

**Militaire—the Marvel of Modern Motorcycles**  
5 Years Ahead of Competition

See it at the Show  
Callaghan—Chicago  
Sept. 20 to 25

Dealers—  
Send in your application  
Name for territory

**UPWARDS of two hundred thousand**  
dollars have been spent to prove that the Militaire is right.  
Expert engineers have examined it and pronounced it right.

Don't think of it as a bike or a car. It's a new type of vehicle.  
It's a single cylinder, 480 cc engine, 3 inch stroke, 2 11/16 bore.  
It's a new type of frame, a new type of steering, a new type of wheels.  
It's a new type of machine, a new type of vehicle.

**Specifications**  
Engine: Single, 480 cc, 3 inch stroke, 2 11/16 bore.  
Frame: New design, no welds.  
Wheels: 28 inch, 12 spoke, wooden.  
Tyres: Goodyear, beaded edge.  
Steering: Hub-centre, no handlebars.  
Seat: High, no saddle.  
Controls: Simple, no clutch, no brake.  
Transmission: New design, no gears, no chain.  
Shaft drive, no gears, no chain.

Dealers: Don't forget to see this at the show and then up to us at our big office.

The Militaire Autocycle Company of America, Buffalo, New York



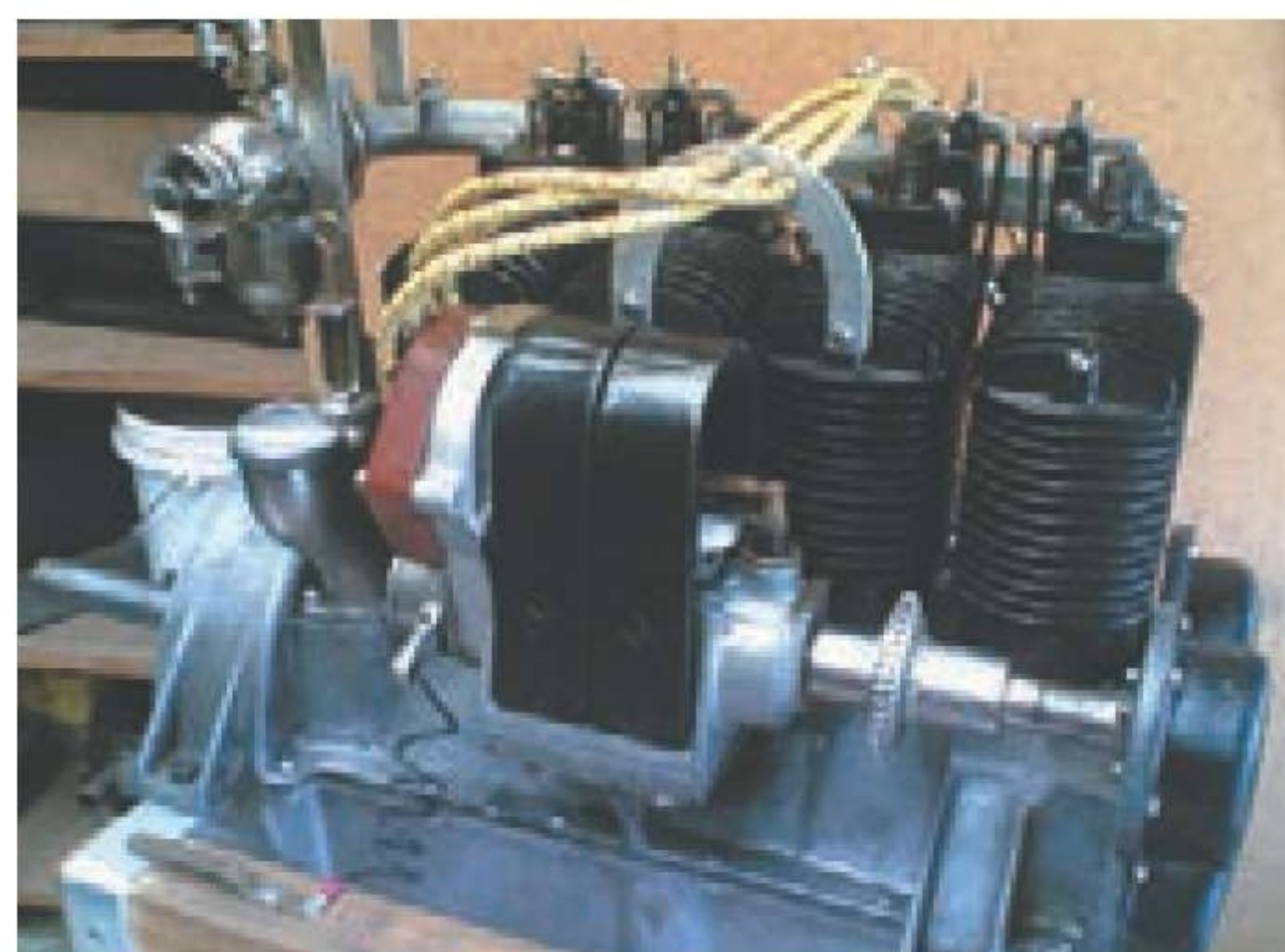
Left: Jim Dennie's 1915 Militaire. Are they training wheels or landing gear?

### Restoration of Motor 197

This engine was located in a shed in Te Atatu in June 2005. It is a late series one motor produced probably in 1915. The later series motors had the Schebler carburettor mounted mid-manifold whereas this first series designed the carburettor at the end of the intake manifold. The Militaire with engine 197 arrived in New Zealand on the *Austral Plain* in shipping case # 55621 and was sold to Skeates and White in Auckland on 15 June 1918 for £55.

When found, the engine was complete but missing the sump, magneto, front timing cover, some timing gears and the exhaust manifold. A sump was recast from a motor borrowed for that purpose #122 (thanks to Peter Thomson) and an oil pump and drive gear modified to fit. The gear pump provides a splash lubrication system via an oil way to the big-ends. The magneto was provided and rewound by Chris Slater and Dave Tompkins manufactured the front timing cover. Chris North and Paul Tomlin have provided great assistance with machining and engineering advice. The work of disassembly, cleanup, restoration and reassembly was completed by Graham Apanui, Leo Fowler and Peter Alderdice.

BW



The history of the machine in the intermediate 79 years is unknown but we would be very grateful for any photos or information or the whereabouts of Militaires.